

Societal Culture and the Changing Role of School Principals in the Post-Soviet Era: the Case of Kazakhstan

Natallia Yakavets

University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of societal and cultural factors on the practices and perceptions of school principals in Kazakhstan.

Design/methodology/approach –The paper draws on empirical data collected in Kazakhstan over two years in the course of an international, collaborative, multi-stranded project.

Findings – The findings support the claim that educational policies and practice are deeply embedded in the national culture, which is an evolving mixture of traditional Kazakh, Russian and diverse ethnic, Soviet and paternalistic cultures. These various societal characteristics exemplify various aspects of the tensions between traditional forms of social organisation, the Soviet legacy, and the sort of educational development promoted by Western educational and international organisations, which now plays an important role in Kazakhstan.

Research limitations/implications – The analysis, though limited in scope, has nevertheless yielded insights into important differences and similarities amongst rural and urban schools and explored the effects of societal cultural factors that shape the practices of school leaders on the periphery of the system.

Originality/value – The paper provides an empirically grounded illustration of the way in which societal culture and cultural norms shape the role of school principals, and how schools cope with a top-down policy in Kazakhstan. By contrasting the norms that shape both existing practice and the reform agenda, the paper offers some explanations for how cultural norms represent both strengths and weaknesses when applied to the process of change in a post-Soviet context.

Keywords Kazakhstan, School Leadership, Societal Culture, Educational Reform, Change

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country that became independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. After gaining independence, it has been claimed that, in essence, ‘Kazakhstan had to create its national heritage largely from scratch, because it had been physically and culturally decimated during the period of the USSR’ (Heyneman, 2000, p.183; DeYoung and Valyayeva, 1997). Kazakh language and history were undervalued and largely missing from its schools (Ruby and Sarinzhapov, 2014, p. 326). Bridges et al. (2014) state that Kazakhstan is ‘shaped by what was, until Stalin’s systematic destruction of this way of

life, the nomadic character of its farming population; shaped by successive invasion from the East, most notably that of Chinghis Khan in the 13th century; shaped by its strategic positioning on the old Silk Roads; shaped by its links with Turkic language and culture (evidenced by its costly refusal to join with Russia against Germany and Turkey in the First World War and by the influential presence today in Kazakhstan of the elite Kazakh-Turkish Lyceum schools); shaped by Stalin's dumping of whole communities in the country during his years of oppression; and shaped by the presence and inward movement until independence of a large Russian population' (pp.272/3). This long and complicated history has created an evolving mixture of cultures in Kazakhstan, as one senior government officer explained:

...we are Kazakhs, nomads, and many cultures crossed our steppes. Even during the USSR, Kazakhstan became a refuge for many repressed nations [...] we have more than 137 nationalities and we have rich experience in intolerance and multiculturalism. (Participant A, 2012)

Many features of contemporary educational policy are clearly focused on reconstructing Kazakh identity, language and culture (Bridges *et al.*, 2014, p. 273).

Currently, Kazakhstan is aiming to reform its educational system substantially, and as rapidly as possible, which makes it an interesting case for the study of educational development. Research on educational reform in Central Asia, and particularly in Kazakhstan, has largely centred on the politics of adopting global reforms, as scholars of comparative education increasingly acknowledge the growing influence of global forces and international organisations on national educational policies (Heyneman, 1995; Asanova, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi *et al.*, 2006; Shagdar, 2006; Silova and Steiner-Khamsi, 2008; Silova, 2011; 2005). Furthermore, numerous studies have described the effects of the reforms on phenomena such as national identity and citizenship (Asanova, 2007); education and social cohesion (Silova *et al.*, 2007; Heyneman, 2000); the secondary education system (Bridges, 2014; Yakavets, 2014; Zhanabayeva and Isatayeva, 2004; DeYoung and Suzhikova, 1997); the practices and policies of school directors (*principals* in Russian); leadership preparation and development (Kalikova 2010; Frost *et al.* 2014; Yakavets *et al.*, 2015; Yakavets 2016); professional development of teachers (Turner *et al.*, 2014, 2016; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2014); changes in educational testing (Winter *et al.*, 2014), the language policy (Mehisto *et al.*, 2014; Fierman, 1998; 2006), and the inclusion of critical thinking pedagogy in the

Kazakhstan educational system (Burkhalter and Shegebayev, 2012; 2010). However, it is equally important to understand that ‘educational policies and practices are deeply embedded in the culture and traditions of the countries in which they are implemented’ (Bridges *et al.*, 2014, p. 272). The relationship between national culture and the role of school principals in Kazakhstan has yet to be adequately explained. This article aims to contribute to this task. It explores how principals in Kazakhstan perceive their role, and how societal and cultural factors are shaping school leaders’ perceptions and practices. These issues are examined against the background of the major state-sponsored educational reforms currently taking place in Kazakhstan.

Recent educational policy in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has been undergoing a profound economic and educational transformation since the beginning of this century. The major drivers for educational reform are a commitment to improving economic competitiveness, with the aim of becoming one of the 30 most developed countries by 2020ⁱ, and a concern to respond to demands for high-quality education according to world standards, on the part of a newly emerging wealthy class (Daly, 2008).

Generally, the educational system in Kazakhstan is highly centralised and bureaucratic as a result of its administrative structures and accountability measures. The school sector in Kazakhstan includes comprehensive schools, gymnasia and lyceums. There are a considerable number of schools referred to as ‘ungraded’ (Rus. *malokomplektnaya shkola*) located in rural areas and often characterised by a low quality of education (Ministry of Education and Science [MoES], 2010). Another important characteristic of the school system in Kazakhstan is the presence of government-funded schools for gifted and talented pupils (Yakavets, 2014; Yakavets, *et al.*, 2015). These schools operate under the umbrella of three major networks: the Autonomous Educational Organisation Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (AEONIS); the Republican Research and Practical Centre, otherwise known as ‘Daryn’, and the Kazakh-Turkish Lyceum. These schools receive additional funding and provide in-depth curricula in specialised subjects. National standards and the curricula are also centrally defined. In the majority of mainstream schools there are traditions of rote learning, teacher-centred pedagogy and a strong emphasis on preparation for a high-stakes examination – the Unified National Test (see Winter *et al.*, 2014). High-performing schools are often selected by the Ministry of Education and Science to pilot educational innovations.

The life of any school is regulated by a number of decrees and guidelines from the Ministry of Education and Science. School principals are personally accountable to the local authority: rural schools, to the district (*rayon*) department of education; city schools, to the city department; and specialised schools, to the region (*oblast*) department and/or their managing organisations, such as AEO NIS or Daryn Centre. As in many other countries (e.g. the UK), principals begin their professional careers as teachers and progress to leadership via a range of leadership tasks and roles, these often being described in the literature as ‘middle leadership’. The latest Order (No.57ⁱⁱ) adopted by the MoES (2012) introduced a new system for selecting principals on a competitive basis, with the successful individuals being awarded five-years’ tenure and the opportunity to reapply at the end of it (see Yakavets, 2016).

Opportunities are being developed for teachers and principals in contemporary Kazakhstan to learn new skills and develop professionally (see Bridges, 2014; Sharimova, 2014; Turner et al., 2014; Yakavets, 2016). For example, through its Centre of Excellence, the AEO NIS is promoting a major programme of in-service training in the form of three-month courses focused on ‘modern’ approaches to teaching and learning; these had reached some 60,000 teachers by the end of 2015 (Turner *et al.*, 2014). A new curriculum is being introduced into all schools following its ‘piloting’ in a specialised set of schools under the auspices of the AEO NIS (Shamshidinova *et al.*, 2014).

Yet there are also high expectations with regard to the implementation of ambitious educational programmes and initiatives (e.g. 12 years of schooling; tri-lingual policy; and a new curriculum and assessment system) in a relatively short period of time, allied to the need to prepare a highly skilled, innovative workforce. But to what extent are people ready to change? What is the role of leadership in terms of effective teaching and learning in this context? To what extent are national cultural factors shaping school leaders’ perceptions and practices? This paper will address these questions.

Theoretical framework

Scholars working in the field of comparative educational leadership claim that a major factor that shapes educational leaders’ practices is culture. Leadership is subject to the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised (Dimmock and Walker, 2005a; 2000; Cheng, 2000; Lee and Hallinger, 2012; Walker *et al.*, 2012). Empirical studies on comparative leadership in international business across countries (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010) and the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness

(GLOBE) study (House *et al.*, 2004), provide useful theoretical and analytical insights for this article. Two models developed by these studies are of value, even though they differ somewhat. There is a complication in the comparison of GLOBE's conclusions with Hofstede's because 'the GLOBE report uses the same terms [...] but with quite different meanings' (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, 43). House *et al.* attempt to show that both individuals and groups of individuals in certain societies possess an implicit leadership theory (Lumby *et al.*, 2009, p. 167). In a reanalysis of the GLOBE project, Geert found that 'the strongest, grouping seven GLOBE dimensions, was highly significantly correlated with national wealth, and next with the Hofstede power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions, in this order' (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 42). The detailed discussion of the two models is beyond the scope of this article (see Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Shi and Wang, 2011). The theoretical framework is based on three dimensions that were significant in Hofstede's and GLOBE's studies - (i) power distance; (ii) uncertainty avoidance; and (iii) individualism/collectivism - as it seems particularly important for developing understanding of the role of societal culture in school leadership practices in Kazakhstan, as presented in Table 1.

Dimensions	Hofstede Model	GLOBE Model
Power Distance	The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (p.61).	The degree to which members of an organisation or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (p.191).	The extent to which members of collectives seek orderliness, consistency, structure, formalised procedures, and laws to cover situations in their daily lives.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	<i>Individualism</i> pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him -or herself and his or her immediate family. <i>Collectivism</i> , as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout their lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (p.92).	<i>Institutional Collectivism</i> – level at which a society values and rewards collective action and resource distribution. <i>In-Group Collectivism</i> - level at which a society values cohesiveness, loyalty, and pride, in their families and organisations.

Table 1 Dimensions of culture measurement in the Hofstede Model and the GLOBE Model. *Source:* Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, House *et al.*, 2004.

It is necessary to clarify the distinction between societal and organisational cultures. Dimmock and Walker (2005a; also Dimmock 2000, 45) claim that organisational cultures can be ‘deliberately managed and changed, whereas societal or national cultures are more enduring and change only gradually over long time periods, if at all’.

The research project

This paper draws on empirical data collected during the course of a collaborative multi-stranded project over two years: 2012-2013. The research team comprised of researchers from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education; the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education and the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. In the first year we sought to understand and to narrate the story of educational reform in Kazakhstan since independence in 1991, the main drivers of this reform and the main elements of the contemporary reform agenda. The evidence was gathered from official documents and interviews with key policy-makers in the capital Astana. In the second year of the research we sought to understand and to describe the way reform appeared when viewed from perspectives at the periphery of the system, including in particular, as seen through the eyes of school principals, teachers, students in small rural schools and those in the local education department and in-service training institutions which were part of the process of ‘transmitting’ or ‘translating’ messages from the centre to the periphery (Internal Report 2014, p. 5).

Three locations across the country were identified by the research team as differing significantly in character: the north, west and south of the country. Our aim was to produce case studies of the schools in the context of educational reform in their localities. In advance of two field trips to Kazakhstan, the members of the research team agreed on the central research questions which we would seek to address through the research. The overarching question was:

How do principals and teachers in mainstream schools perceive and understand the aspirations, expectations and requirements of contemporary educational reforms in Kazakhstan – and how are they responding to these?

In this paper we shall look at the following question: To what extent are national cultural factors shaping school leaders’ perceptions and practices in Kazakhstan?

Methods

A multi-site case study approach was adopted, based on the view, widely supported in the literature, that it provides a powerful means of investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2003), thereby providing in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2009; Lichtman, 2006).

To be able to conduct case studies in local schools the research team had to obtain permission from the Regional Departments of Education. The selection of six schools to be included in the research (two schools in each region) was based on the recommendations of regional educational officials through their knowledge of, and work with, schools. The research team adapted the BERA (2011) ethical principles, especially in relation to informed consent, and also sought to satisfy the ethical requirements laid down by participating organisations. Providing confidentiality and anonymity of participants was seen to be especially important since anything said could be reported back to superiors. Participants were coded by their job title, Roman numerals were used for locations (I-III), and schools were coded using the capital letters 'A-F', with 'LG' for local department of education.

The six case study schools varied considerably in terms of school type, size, location, social and economic status, school development history, and student and community composition (see Appendix). Four of the selected schools were high performing ones in their geographical area. It was clear that regional educational officials were more interested in providing evidence of the 'best practice' and hiding any problems, instead of identifying and addressing them. While these schools cannot provide a reliable basis for precise generalisation to all schools in Kazakhstan, they do reveal important differences between schools and are likely to show the effects of many of the factors that shape all schools in the country.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, vice principals, teachers, and other informants from local education authorities and in-service teacher training institutes. Each interview was carried out by two or three researchers, at least one of whom was trilingual in English, Kazakh and Russian. Interviews were conducted at participants' convenience in schools or in a preferred location, and were digitally recorded. The average interview length was approximately one hour.

School principals participating in the research had a wide range of experience, from two who had been in post for a year, to one who had 16 years of principalship and was

approaching retirement (see Appendix). The majority of principals who were interviewed had experience of principalship in only one school. Secondary data were also obtained from such sources as official school documents, school portfolios, each of the school's annual reports and strategic planning documents, as well as some teaching materials developed by the staff (where applicable).

During a second field trip semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents from regional and district education authorities, pre- and in-service teacher training institutions and pedagogical universities in three locations. Furthermore, we spoke with school principals again to conduct 'member checks' and to clarify some unclear issues raised during the first field trip. This approach helped to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what had been recorded during the first interviews. Overall a total of 80 respondents were interviewed (Table 2). By collecting these types of data it was possible to develop case studies of school experience in the different local contexts.

Case Studies	Interviews	Teacher Focus Group	Student Focus Group	Lesson Observations
Schools B,C,D,E,F,G	54	10	8	26
Regional Educational Organisations	26	-	-	-
Total	80	10	8	26

Table 2. Cross-site summary of 2013 data

Qualitative data were coded using NVivo 10. A group of six researchers who were working on coding organised a number of meetings (involving Skype calls) – a 'peer debriefing' - to discuss and clarify the coding nodes to improve the reliability of the interpretations. In this way, agreement was reached on the basic nine themes. After coding, interview transcripts, thematic summaries, categorical matrices and analytical memos were used to develop analytic themes specifically relating to school leaders' practices and experiences. Furthermore, multiple perspectives from various participants and different sources of information (e.g. focus groups, observations, documentary analysis) permitted for triangulation of the data.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. Firstly, it does not focus on ways in which various personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, year of administration/teaching) may influence a principal's practices. Secondly, the interviews were conducted in Kazakhs and/or Russian with translation into English provided by one of the researchers. Some researchers engaged in international comparative studies fail to mention translation issues at all (Temple and Young, 2004, p. 174). Others have attempted to 'domesticate' the research at different points. The early 'domestication' of research into written English, as Temple and Young (2004) argue, may mean that ties between language and identity/culture are cut, which is to the disadvantage of non-English speakers. During interviews we had to make decisions about the cultural meanings which languages carried (e.g. Kazakh/English/Russian), and look for different words to capture the same meaning; we had to work hard to make ourselves mutually understood and to reach agreed meanings. Finally, care had to be exercised in interpreting the interview data because of the danger that participants would hide problems to avoid any criticism of their own schools.

Findings

Dimension: Power Distance

Anyone who has worked in Kazakhstan understands that policy and control of virtually any school function or aim come from the top, as do almost all reforms. Indeed, our data reveal that the President's speeches - enshrined in law, government policies and initiatives - are reflected in every school's development plan, this representing a five-year programme to be reviewed and updated on a yearly basis. The themes of each school's development plan varied depending on the different priorities that had been identified. It was often the case that schools had to adjust their internal plans when suddenly new initiatives were introduced:

We are immersed in these educational reforms. We have to use all innovations. In any case, whether you want it or not – you have to use them, after some time you understand that such use is necessary...There are some issues that are handed down to us from the Ministry or from the Department of Education – if they order us to send them something...we cannot discuss this decision. We have to perform immediately. (Two Vice-Principals, School C)

The evidence suggests that top-down policies could change the entire life of a school:

...We never dreamed of being a trilingual school. We were a well-developed, prospective school with advanced level of English. We were able to give high results... In [...] we became not only a trilingual school but also a school for gifted children. We had been told that we have to do this, and we said, 'OK, we will do...' (Vice-Principal, School G)

The trilingual policy meant that science and mathematics would be taught through the medium of English in the senior grades. The school had to start implementing the project with the complete absence of textbooks and teachers possessing both knowledge of English and the relevant subject. The school embraced this challenge, as one of the teachers described:

I was teaching English. Before the start of the year, I sacrificed 4-5 months to the programme, to study physics and every holiday I was gathering information to use later on...summer was spent on preparation (English-Physics Teacher, School G).

The situation was even more complicated because, although students were studying science through the medium of English, they would have to take the examination – the Unified National Test – which is offered in either Kazakh or Russian. Similarly, in another part of the country School E was selected for trilingual education and faced the following challenge: there were highly experienced mathematics teachers but they lacked English language skills. The schools had to introduce a business English course outside the school curriculum to develop students' language skills:

In the beginning, I thought that our school is not ready [for trilingual education] as we are a maths-oriented school; we were struggling against it, and also languages. Then we brainstormed and [...] we introduced business English into our curriculum. Of course, it would be good if we teach maths in English, but we do not have a specialist who can teach it in English. (School E, Vice-Principal 2)

These examples illustrate three key points. Firstly, schools with good academic results and success in Olympiadsⁱⁱⁱ were generally seen to be well run, engaged in the reform agenda, forward-looking and thriving. These schools are usually the first to be selected for some experimental work by educational officials, without any consultation with schools. Secondly, the schools show remarkable resilience and willingness to make things work by inventing

their own solutions. Finally, the top-down initiatives put more pressure on school principals to implement ‘orders from above’ and, at the same time, provide support for teachers and students in a situation in which teaching materials are scarce.

According to legislation^{iv}, a principal is primarily responsible for the failures and successes of school management and administration, and for teachers’ and students’ performance (see Yakavets, 2016). Our data reveal that the majority of school principals have to spend a lot of time producing reports for numerous organisations (e.g. for the local authority, concerning finance, health and safety, fire etc.), meeting inspections and being responsible for running the day-to-day operation of the school, from monitoring the water supply and heating system to overseeing provision of furniture, stationary and so on.

...by the time we develop our opinion [about reforms], the information is in a different form...Also the difficulties exist. Just take a look at these 28 folders. We receive a lot of letters. The paperwork consumes most of the time. (Vice-Principal 2, School F)

Huge policy changes have been called for in Kazakhstan over the last two decades as the country has sought to move away from, or beyond, its Soviet educational traditions and practices. However, in Kazakhstan, school principals are still mainly perceived as ‘managers’ and ‘administrators’ whose major role is concerned with ensuring compliance with state norms and orders rather than providing innovative leadership or even much in the way of directions:

Unfortunately, we have specific orders, specific law and requirements under, and in accordance with, which we have to operate. There are principals who want to introduce something interesting, and they can do this after discussion. We have a specialised council, where we discuss the issue and if such innovation meets our laws and requirements, it can be realised. (Officer-1, Rayon Department of Education)

It was also acknowledged that there were some examples of strong school leaders who were able to produce some achievements over the years:

The school principal is the main person in the school’s implementation of new ideas and methods. She/he is supposed to be strong....After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all schools had equal positions and levels. Since then and so far, some strong school principals have taken the initiative into their own hands and built new lyceums and gymnasiums. Not only did they build new facilities, but they also trained their staff, developed new experimental ideas and defended them during expert review... (Officer-2, Rayon Department of Education)

The current education policy (MoES, 2010) set the aim of establishing Boards of Trustees in all schools by 2020. The evidence from our research suggests that while in some schools Boards have been set up, their role has been seen to be different from what can be found, for example, in schools in England:

We were told to create the Board...we did so...we have parents involved. But we did not see the value – nobody is willing to make financial contributions. Then, I can be blamed for collecting money from parents...it can be perceived incorrectly. (Principal, School D)

Our data suggest that principals perceived their roles in mixed terms: as a ‘playing coach’; ‘being a good mentor for the staff’; ‘being democratic’; ‘sharing experience’, ‘offering a pedagogic model’, ‘writer’, ‘sharer’. At the same time, the complexity and challenging nature of the principals’ role was acknowledged by teachers who often used a range of metaphors to describe a good principal, such as: ‘organiser’, ‘leader’, ‘advisor’, ‘supporter’, ‘parent’ (of his/her school team); ‘the moon’; ‘manager’; ‘organiser of the educational process’; and someone ‘who is consultative, kind, ethical, demanding, dynamic, attentive, serious-minded, educated, understanding, and who treats others as an equal’. Respondents acknowledged that nowadays being a principal means carrying a great deal of responsibility and ‘not everyone will manage it’:

Now the directors are different - they are managers. They not only manage the educational process, but also do things such as managing the budget...they are computer ‘savvies’. (Vice-Principal-1, School E)

Dimension: Uncertainty Avoidance

Kazakhstan ranks highly in terms of uncertainty avoidance (see House *et al.*, 2004). While participants sounded positive about reforms, some claimed that it should be ‘the process of evolution’, in which ‘evolution means a step-by-step process of gradual increase’ (Teacher, School F). As discussed above, innovation is neither encouraged, nor highly valued as it often brings more challenges to teachers’ and children’s lives.

...Kazakhs love reform. Why do I say this? Because we are descendants of a nomad [...] We had never had fences or walls. We as the people are always open. [...] We were always

susceptible to good changes. At the same time it is a bad quality. But I think that it has more pluses, than minuses. (Participant A, Pre-Service-Institute)

While evidence from this research shows examples of innovative practices across the case study schools, ordinary teachers generally have, at best, limited opportunities to initiate change or to raise questions for discussion about major issues. As teachers in a focus group claimed:

What educational reforms could there be, if a person is overloaded? (Teacher A)

The results suggest that initiatives at school level often come from school principals. For example, two rural schools involved in the research project showed a willingness to change, indeed a zeal in grasping change. Both principals were clearly confident in their own authority and their capacity to engage support both inside and outside the school. They cultivated local patrons, seemed to have a good relationship with officers in the *rayon* department of education and appeared to have the local village community, and in particular the parents, on their side. In small rural communities some resources were available for schools from local sources (e.g. the Cultural Centre) with reduced costs and/or the provision of free labour (e.g. when parents voluntarily helped to paint classrooms). Moreover, in some cases principals were able to use central initiatives for their own purposes. For example, the principal of School D was very astute at capitalising on his school's successes and being ahead of the game in engaging with reform initiatives that brought material benefit to the school, such as computers that were provided as part of the e-learning initiative. Similarly, the principal from School F claimed that 'we should try to do something all by ourselves rather than waiting' and managed to get support from the *rayon* local education department to open a Resource Centre in his school for other neighbouring rural schools to use.

Our school is Resource Centre. Other schools can freely get information from us and use the facilities. It is more about sharing experience. (Principal, School F)

At the same time, it was apparent that school leaders were 'micro-managed' by the centralised control of school-level decision-making and were required to submit all sorts of relatively insignificant decisions for approval by the local administration.

The evidence from the research suggests that people in schools seek stability and routines and follow written rules and regulations as guidance for their practices. All principals saw the necessity of improving the conditions in their schools and creating a supportive environment that could make a positive impact on the quality of teaching and children's learning and performance. Although funding from the local educational department was not enough by itself to meet schools' needs, principals managed to find ways to improve classrooms, facilities and, to some extent, school buildings:

Ever since I was appointed as the *director*, I have been engaged in furnishing the conditions for teachers: considered the rooms, the surroundings; did everything possible in order not to let secondary issues distract the teachers. The most important thing is to create good conditions, and then later on my part is to strictly monitor and supervise the work. (Principal, School G)

By improving working conditions and applying pressure and strict control, principals aimed to improve teachers' performance.

Staff stability was seen as an important factor that affects a school's sense of efficacy. In rural School D many novice members of staff were ex-pupils and the overall stability of the school was sustained by this. Moreover, the principal had served for nearly all his working life in the same school, and there was a core of very long-serving teachers there. Indeed, there was a very low turnover of staff with many current staff having been in post for a long time:

...they are like the members of one family; even graduates come back to this school to work.
(Teacher-2, School D)

One of the most important effects of having a group of people with long histories in the school was the sense and existence of continuity and stability. There was evidence of leadership succession observed in case study School E where the ex-principal remained on the staff as a vice-principal, having effectively swapped responsibilities with her successor. Succession of one to the other's post seemed to be generally accompanied by a sense of relief because the stability of the school was unaffected by the principal's retirement.

Orderliness and consistency were observed in almost all schools that research teams visited. Glossy posters and colourful displays covered most spare wall space in schools,

celebrating the distinguished figures from Kazakh history and culture, and prize-winning students. These images were seen as playing a powerful role in developing Kazakh national identity, respect for cultural traditions and pride in the school. Some classrooms had pictures at the door of ‘sponsors’ – people who were honoured by schools and who, in return, helped to equip, furnish or maintain a particular classroom named after them. The children were smartly turned out and equally orderly. The staff were formally dressed too. In general there was a very strong sense of care, order and discipline in the schools.

Despite the fact that all schools were working in two shifts (because of a shortage of classrooms), the wellbeing of children and teachers seemed to be a top priority. Each school was equipped with a canteen that served food made on the premises to staff and students. Of course, conditions in the schools varied to some degree. For example, in rural School F a bucket on a chair in the small canteen area was the only source of drinking water for students and the sports hall lacked heating and was in visible need of major repairs. In this respect the school fell below national standards of hygiene, but it was beyond the school’s power to do much about this when the village as a whole lacked essential infrastructure. In another rural school (School D), there was a large television screen in the foyer, with benches available to sit in front of it, which, according to the principal, indicated allowed speeches by the President and such like to be displayed for the briefing of staff and students.

Dimension: Collectivism

Kazakhstan has a highly collectivist culture. Kazakh people have a long history of being members of extended families in which family relations are recalled as far back as the seventh generation. Speaking about Kazakh traditions, Dzhebylbin (2010) explains:

To respect elders, to take care of the young, to offer hospitality to unknown travellers [...], this was the proper standard of social relationships. (p.26)

The data reveal that principals are well-known and respected people, both in villages (Kaz. *auls*) and in urban locations. Principals focused much of their effort on developing parental and community support and engagement, and stressed the importance of the history, culture, needs and interests of the local community. Kazakh cultural traditions are highly valued and respected in all schools. For example, the warmth of the welcome given to the research teams

in the rural Schools F and D, and the generosity of the hospitality were signals that this community is firmly embedded in its local Kazakh culture. There is a strong emphasis on traditional values and culture reinforced by explicit teaching of, for example, moral principles, Kazakh proverbs and Abai's wisdom, as well as incorporation of them in Kazakh history lessons and language lessons, as observed by the research teams.

Auls are distant from cultural centres [...] you can find only one school, one club, one library and one mosque here. These all were in stagnation, and I thought these cultural features should be developed from *aul's* [...] I have done a lot of works, writing verses and songs, performing them all by myself, tried to revive cultural values...(Principal, School F)

Principals commented that they had a 'great team' and 'devoted people' who often took on multiple roles and responsibilities within the school. It was common for staff to show great solidarity, especially when inspections occurred, as the principal commented 'nobody will say it is out of their range of professional knowledge and competency' (School B).

The way in which principals characterised their leadership was often *collegial*. They reported that they 'consult with teachers, consider teachers' advice'; 'not ordering [teachers]'. But in reality, there is little discussion involving the whole staff or opportunities for debate. The principal of rural School D insisted that choices made about involvement in various schemes that formed part of the reform process and other extra-curricular activities, such as Olympiads (and even our research visit), were discussed 'democratically with senior members of the staff in line with the philosophy of a community decision by elders'. A common finding across our interviews was a metaphorical comparison of a school's culture with 'the family':

...we are one big family and like in any family there are some flaws and members are imperfect, irresponsible at times. We criticise each other sometimes, and even take disciplinary action.... If there is a need to mobilise for action, they do so and demonstrate best results... I always remind teachers that we are a team, we are one whole family, we come here every morning, and this is our home, so we should do everything with love...(Principal, School B)

The importance of family as a narrative for making sense of work in schools is that it welded together the lives of children, teachers, parents and the community. It is not surprising that principals were seen as 'parent/head/father' of the family:

...the directors should be parents for their school teams, otherwise the whole team will fall apart and there will be no use for it. (Deputy Principal, School F)

The principal appears to act as the head of the family, potentially not only within the school, but also within the wider community. (Teacher, School D)

Discussion

Kazakhstan is experiencing a challenging time of transition, which puts enormous pressure on school leaders and teachers. The data gathered in this study suggest that the entire life of all schools is framed by bureaucratic oversight and regulations. School leaders have to spend an enormous amount of time on administrative issues that bring serious consequences for any school if there is evidence of 'poor performance'. School principals are seen to be more an extension of the local administration than members of the teaching staff; even some had a few hours of teaching.

The obstacles to educational reform described in schools in three locations across Kazakhstan seem remarkably similar to those identified in the Western literature, including shifting or unclear goals, lack of communication of the vision, lack of resources and lack of knowledge and skills (Hallinger, 2010; Fullan, 2007; Kotter and Cohen, 2002). As discussed above, the decision about trilingual education was not even discussed with the schools which were selected to pilot the innovations, and no specific directions, materials or, importantly, qualified teachers to accomplish those goals were provided. This creates 'emptiness', where by tasks are given to schools and teachers but with little support or training in how to handle the new responsibilities. Similarly, an 'empty space' was created when schools had to establish Boards of Trustees, with ambiguity about their roles and responsibilities. The schools had no option but to comply with imposed changes. There is the tension between the model of leadership and the ideas that are embodied in current educational reforms.

The data show that there are limited opportunities to gain understanding of the complexity of various initiatives and their rationale. Røvik (2011) invokes the metaphor of *a virus infection* when describing how educational ideas change or mutate in response to their interactions with local culture and values. This often leads to the fragmented implementation of reforms without careful consideration of how the 'new pieces of the puzzle' fit together

(Cheng and Walker, 2008; Hallinger, 2010). Considerations of ‘cultural fit’ are sometimes discussed, but less often is there any substantial adaptation of the innovation (Cheng and Walker, 2008; Dimmock and Walker, 2005a; 2005b; Hallinger *et al.*, 2005).

In addition to challenges embedded in the Kazakhstani system of education, there is a strong belief among practitioners in the value, achievements and significance of the Soviet system of education. There were a number of comments expressed by respondents in the study, for example, ‘Why change? We had such a good [Soviet] system of education?’ The lesson observations in schools showed that while some interactive activities, the ICT and group work were used, teacher-centred pedagogy tended to dominate, along with a heavy emphasis on the acquisition of academic knowledge through memorisation. There is a move towards new teaching methods, critical thinking and problem-solving skills but while people may know about them, it is often challenging to apply them in practice because of some normative constraints and a fear-based, top-down system of thinking.

Principals in our study had considerable authority, and teachers and children respected leaders’ authority and regarded it as inappropriate to question it. It seems that power distance breeds a cultural tendency for Kazakhstani leaders to lead by directive and to focus more on ‘telling’ staff which tasks were to be accomplished, and, correspondingly, the staff expected to receive orders: ‘Do this!’ (Yakavets, 2016). With regard to reforms, power distance could play a dual role: gaining people’s attention and ensuring their compliance with orders, but also generating underground resistance to change.

While some principals described their leadership style as ‘collegial’ and ‘democratic’, in reality it was in line with what Paul Begley (2000) calls ‘cultural isomorphs’. Reflecting on his experience of working with school administrators from many countries, Begley explains that, for example, ‘Russian school administrators mean something very different from their Canadian or Asian counterparts when they speak of establishing “consensus” as part of the process of establishing a collective school improvement objective. For the Russians, the consensus has traditionally been something handed down in a fully-approved form from a centralised authority’ (Begley, 2000, p. 24). The Russian notion of consensus reflects more collective cultural norms, which are also present in Kazakhstan.

Hofstede argues that in a collectivist society the relationship between the employer and employee resembles the familial pattern, involving mutual but unequal obligations towards each other. As noted earlier, in this study respondents continually used family metaphors

when describing relationships in their schools. In line with this, some school leaders displayed a ‘paternalistic’ or ‘maternal’ attitude, claiming that ‘teachers are like children and should be brought up’, thus principals ‘should lead the teachers and teach them’ (Principal, School G). The results from this research match the concept of ‘*paternalistic leadership*’ (Farh and Cheng, 2000). Dimmock and Tan (2012, p. 332) argue that ‘paternalism is a paradigmatic archetype of leadership style, whose elements are moderated by socio-political contexts and whose “benefits” may not be immediately obvious to the observer outside the cultural system’. The roots of paternalistic and participative leadership could be explained by Kazakh traditions of ‘*aksakals*’^{vi} (Kaz. ‘*white beard*’) – the old men’s councils. In a situation of a high degree of power distance ‘respect for parents and other elders is considered as a basic virtue’ (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 67). Nowadays *aksakals* exist as an unofficial local administration in some rural areas in Kazakhstan. Bakacsi et al. (2002) argue that ‘large consultative bodies combined with a paternalistic leadership style (asking opinion of others) have been a dominant pattern in status conscious eastern societies’.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide insights into the relationship between national culture and the changing role of school leaders in the context of large-scale educational reform in Kazakhstan. As elaborated above, educational policies and practices in Kazakhstan are deeply embedded in societal culture and traditions. Overall, schools and school principals are influenced by an evolving mixture of the following: traditional Kazakh cultural values (e.g. harmony; collectivism; loyalty to one’s superior); a paternalistic culture (e.g. a traditional form of ‘family’ relations used as a model for the whole of society; respect for the elderly); and the Soviet legacy (e.g. a top-down information flow; order and obedience; uncertainty-avoidance and the ‘wish for order’). This range of societal characteristics highlights the tensions between traditional forms of social organisation, the Soviet legacy, and the sort of educational development promoted by Western educational and international organisations, which now plays an important role in Kazakhstan.

There is agreement in the literature that organisational change requires knowledge of the national culture and local contexts. Furthermore, research evidence suggests that the traditional power of school principals can be a useful tool in the reform process, reinforcing change as a priority (see Lee and Hallinger, 2012). In order to make reforms work, however,

Kazakhstan has to confront significant conflicts and contradictions between the desire to reach world educational standards and the basic values of Kazakh society, which underpin a more traditional educational system.

This article contributes to the literature in two main ways. Firstly, it provides an empirically grounded illustration of the way in which societal culture and cultural norms shape the role of the school principal. More particularly, it provides insights into the changing role of school leaders and how schools in Kazakhstan cope with a top-down policy. Secondly, by contrasting the norms that shape both existing practice and the reform agenda this paper offers some explanation for how cultural norms represent both strengths and weaknesses when applied to the process of change in a post-Soviet context. Though the paper focuses on the recent experience of Kazakhstan, these issues have relevance for other countries in the region that share the Soviet legacy and are currently experiencing transition to a different kind of political and social order.

References:

- Asanova, J. (2006), "Emerging regions, persisting rhetoric of educational aid: the impact of the Asian Development Bank on educational policy making in Kazakhstan", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp.655-666.
- Asanova, J. (2007), "Teaching the canon? Nation-building and post-Soviet Kazakhstan's literature textbooks", *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol.37 No. 3, pp.325-343.
- Bakacsi, G., Sandor, T., Andras, K., Viktor, A. (2002), "Eastern European cluster: tradition and transition", *Journal of World Business*, Vol.37, No. 1, pp.69-80.
- Begley, P. (2000), "Cultural isomorphs of educational administration: reflections on Western-centric approaches to values and leadership", *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Vol.20 No.2, pp.23-33.
- Bridges, D. (Ed.) (2014), *Education Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bridges, D., Kurakbayev, K., Kambatyrova, A. (2014), Lost – and found – in translation? Interpreting the processes of the international and intranational translation of educational policy and practice in Kazakhstan, in Bridges, D. (Ed.), *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.263-286.
- Burkhalter, N., and Shegebayev, M.R. (2012), "Critical thinking as culture: teaching post-Soviet teachers in Kazakhstan", *International Review Education*, Vol.58 No.1, pp.55-72.
- Cheng, Y.C. (2000), "Cultural factors in educational effectiveness: a framework for comparative research", *School Leadership and Management* Vol. 20 No.2, pp.207-225.
- Cheng, Y.C. and Walker, A. (2008), "When reform hits reality: the bottleneck effect in Hong King primary schools", *School Leadership and Management* Vol. 28 No.5, pp.505-521.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009), *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.*, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London.
- Daly, J. C. K. (2008), *Kazakhstan's Emerging Middle Class. Silk Road Paper* (pp. 99). Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. Silk Road Studies Program.

- DeYoung, A., and Suzhikova, B. (1997), "Issues in post-Soviet secondary school reform: the case of Kazakhstan". *International Journal of Educational Reform*, Vol.6 No.4, pp.441-454.
- DeYoung, A., and Valyayeva, G. (1997), "Post-Soviet secondary school reform: the views of the 149 classroom teachers", *Central Asia Monitor*, Vol. 3, pp.22-34.
- DeYoung, A. and Nadirbekyzy, B. (1996), Redefining schooling and communism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In Young, A.J. (Ed). *Politics of Education Association Yearbook*, Falmer Press, Washington, DC, pp.71-78.
- Dimmock, C. (2000), *Designing the Learning-Centred School. A cross-cultural perspective*. Falmer Press, New York.
- Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2000), "Developing comparative and international educational leadership and management: a cross-cultural model", *School Leadership and Management*, Vol.20 No.2, pp.143-160.
- Dimmock, C. and Tan, C.Y. (2012), "Educational leadership in Singapore: tight coupling, sustainability, scalability, and succession", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol.51 No.3, pp.320-340.
- Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2005a), *Educational Leadership: Culture and diversity*. Sage, London.
- Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2005b), School leadership in context: societal and organisational cultures, in Bush, T. and Bell, L. (Eds.), *The Principles and Practice of Educational Management*. Paul Chapman, London, pp.70-85.
- Dzhebylbin, E. (2010), *Traditions and Customs of Kazakhs*, Mir Pechati, Kokshetau.
- Farh, J.L., and Cheng, B.S. (2000) A cultural analysis of paternalistic leadership in Chinese organisations, in Li, J.T., Tsui, A.S., and Walton, S.E. (Eds.), *Management and Organisations in Chinese Context*. MacMillan, London, pp.95-197.
- Fierman, W. (1998), "Language and identity in Kazakhstan. Formulations in Policy Documents 1987-1997". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31 No.2, pp.171-186.
- Fierman, W. (2006), "Language and education in post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-medium instruction in urban schools", *Russian Review*, Vol. 65 No. 1, pp.98-116.
- Frost, D., Fimyar, O., Yakavets, N., and Bilyalov D. (2014), The role of the school director in education reform in Kazakhstan, in Bridges, D. (Ed.), *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp.217-238.
- Fullan, M. (2007), *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. Columbia University, Teacher College Press, New York.
- Hallinger, P. (2010), "Making education reform happen: is there an 'Asian' way?" *School Leadership and Management: Formerly School Organisation*, Vol.35 No.5, pp.401-418.
- Hallinger, P., Walker, A., and Bajunid, I. (2005), "Educational leadership in East Asia: implications for education and global society", *UCEA Review* Vol.46 No.1, pp.1-4.
- Heyneman, S. (1995), Education in the Europe and Central Asia RegionL Policies of adjustment and excellence, in Mertons, R.J.H. (Ed.), *Reflection on Education in Russia*, Acco, Amersfort, pp.23-53.
- Heyneman, S. (1998), "The transition from party/state to open democracy: the role of education". *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 18 No.1, pp.21-40.
- Heyneman, S. (2000), "From the party/state to multiethnic democracy: education and social cohesion in Europe and Central Asia", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol.22 No.2, pp.173-191.
- Heyneman, S., and DeYoung, A. (2004), *The Challenge of Education in Central Asia*, Information Age Publishing, Greenwich, CT.
- Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills CA.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, M. (2010), *Cultures and Organisations. Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, McGrawHill, New York.
- House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P.W., Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations. The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- House, R.J., Wright, N.S., Aditya, R.N. (1997), Cross-cultural research on organisational leadership: a critical analysis and proposed theory, in Earley P.C. and Erez, M. (Eds.), *New Perspective in*

- International Industrial Organisational Psychology*, New Lexington, San Francisco, pp.535-625.
- Internal Report, (2014), *The Improvement of the Secondary Education Curriculum of Kazakhstan in the Context of Modern Reforms*. 3rd Report on the research collaboration between University of Cambridge Faculty of Education and Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. CU FoE, Cambridge.
- Kalikova, S. (2010), "School leadership developments in Kazakhstan: challenges and perspectives" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the 54th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Palmer House Hotel, March 1-5, 2010, Chicago, Illinois.
- Kotter, J., and Cohen, D. (2002), *The Heart of Change*, Harvard Business School Press NHS Improvement Foundation, Boston.
- Lee, M., and Hallinger, P. (2012), "National context influencing principals' use: Economic development, societal culture, and educational system", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol.23 No.4, pp.461-482.
- Lichtman, M. (2006), *Qualitative Research in Education: a User's Guide*: Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Lumby, J, Walker, A, Bryant, M, Bush, T, and Björk, L.G. (2009), Research on leadership preparation in a global context, Young, M.D., Crow, G.M., Murphy, J. and Ogawa, R.T. (eds) *Handbook of Research on the Education of School Leaders*, Routledge, New York, pp.157-194.
- McLaughlin, C., McLellan, R., Fordham, M. (2014), The Role of Teacher in Educational Reform in Kazakhstan: Teacher Enquiry as a Vehicle for Change, in Bridges, D. (Ed.) *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.239-260.
- Mehisto, P., Kambatyrova, A., Nurseitova, K.(2014), Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice, in Bridges, D. (Ed.) *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.152-176.
- MoES(Ministry of Education and Science). (2010). State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020. Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan no.1118, 7 December 2010, MoES, Astana.
- MoES (2012) Order of the Minister of Education and Science on approval of the Rules for competitive substitution of heads of state institution of secondary education No. 57, February 21, 2012. Available at: <http://www.edu.gov.kz/ru/documents/prikaz-ministra-obrazovaniya-i-nauki-respubliki-kazahstan-ot-21-fevralya-2012-goda-no-57> (accessed 5 May 2015).
- Nysanbayev, A. (2004), "Kazakhstan: Cultural Inheritance and Social Transformation", *Kazakh Philosophical Studies*, Vol.I. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Røvik, K.A. (2011), "From fashion to virus: an alternative theory of organisations; handling of management ideas", *Organisation Studies*, Vol.32 No.5, pp.631-635.
- Ruby., Sarinzhapov, A. (2014), Towards the Next Stage of Reform in Kazakhstan, in Bridges, D. (Ed.) *Educational Reform and Internationalisation The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.325-334.
- Shagdar, B. (2006), "Human Capital in Central Asia: Trends and Challenges in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.25 No. 4, pp.515-532.
- Shamshidinova, K., Ayubayeva, N., and Bridges, D. (2014), Implementing Radical Change: Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools as Agents of Change, in Bridges, D. (Ed.), *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp.71-82.
- Sharimova A (2014), "School leadership", *Pedagogical Dialogue*, Vol.3 No.9, pp.22-29.
- Shi, X., Wang, J. (2011), "Interpreting Hofstede Model and GLOBE Model: which way to go for cross-cultural research?" *International Journal of Business and Management*, Vol.6 No.5, pp.93-99.
- Silova, I. (2005), "Travelling policies: hijacked in Central Asia", *European Educational Research Journal* Vol.4 No.1. pp.50-59.

- Silova, I. (2011), *Globalisation on the Margins. Education and Postsocialist Transformations in Central Asia*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, North Carolina.
- Silova, I., Johnson, M., & Heneman, S.P. (2007), "Education and the crisis of social cohesion in Azerbaijan and Central Asia", *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 51 No.2, pp.159-180.
- Silova, I., & Steiner-Khamsi, G. (Eds.) (2008), *How NGOs React. Globalization and Education Reform in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfieldm CT.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., Silova, I., Johnson, E.M. (2006), Neoliberalism liberally applied: education policy borrowing in Central Asia, in Ozga, J., Seddon, T., and Popkewitz, T. (Eds.), 2006 World Yearbook of Education. Education Research and Policy: Steering the Knowledge-Based Economy, Routledge, New York, London, pp.217-245.
- Temple, B., and Young, A. (2004), "Qualitative research and translation dilemmas". *Qualitative Research*, Vol.4 No.2, pp.161-178.
- Turner, F. Wilson E., Ispussinova, S., Kassymbekov, Y., Sharimova, A., Balgynbayeva, B. & Brownhill, S. (2014), Centres of Excellence: Systemwide Transformation of Teaching Practice, in Bridges, D. (Ed.) *Educational reform and internationalisation: The case of school reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.83-105.
- Walker, A., Hu, R., and Qian, H.-Y. (2012), "Principal leadership in China: An initial review", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol.23 No.4, pp.369-399.
- Winter, L., Rimini, C., Soltanbekova, A., Tynybayeva, M. (2014), The Culture and Practice of Assessment in Kazakhstan: The Unified National Test, Past and Present, in Bridges, D. (Ed.) *Educational Reform and Internationalisation: The Case of School Reform in Kazakhstan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge pp.106-132.
- Yakovets, N. (2014), "Reforming society through education for gifted children: the case of Kazakhstan", *Research Papers in Education*, Vol. 29 No.5, pp. 513-533.
- Yakovets, N. Frost, D. Khoroshash, A. (2015), "School leadership and capacity building in Kazakhstan", *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603124.2015.1066869>
- Yakovets N. (2016), "Negotiating the principles and practice of school leadership: the Kazakhstan experience", *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*. DOI:10.1177/1741143216628537.
- Yin, R.K. (2003), *Case study research: design and methods*. Sage Publications, California: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Zhanabayeva, S., and Isatayeva, L. (2004), Secondary education reform in Kazakhstan. The case of the Maksat school, in Heyneman, S. and DeYoung, A.J. (Eds.) *The Challenges of Education in Central Asia*, Information Age Publishing, New York, pp.243-256.

Appendix

Case study	Type	Location	School Reputation	Number of Teachers	Number of Students	Students Background	Principal Experience	Educational Experiments	Language of Instruction	UNT Score***
School B	Ungraded Comprehensive School (with a mini-centre)	Location I North, Village (Kaz. <i>aul</i>)	Average	42	314 (incl. pre-school)	Students from low SES and <i>Oralmans</i> * students	Female, 3 years in post	E-learning	Kazakh	85.5
School C	Secondary Comprehensive School	Location I North, Suburban	Average	62	636	Diverse students from rural villages	Female, 22 years in the school; 6 years as the principal	Gymnasium classes	Kazakh (12 classes) Russian (19 classes)	83.2
School D	Comprehensive School	Location II West, Village	High (best rural school)	113	1103	Diverse students; and <i>Oralmans</i> -students	Male – 46 years of work in the school; 10years in post	12-year schooling E-learning	Kazakh	72.0
School E	Economic Lyceum** (mixed school) – Grades 7-11	Location II West, City	Very high	41	476	selective students	Female – 16 years in the school, one year in post	Trilingual policy	Kazakh, Russian, English	95.7
School F	Ungraded Comprehensive School (with a mini-centre)	Location III South, Village	High (best rural school)	33	210	Diverse students from local villages	Male – 8 years in the school as the principal	E-learning; Pilot school for Orleu	Kazakh	63.8
School G	Secondary Comprehensive School for gifted and talented children**	Location III South, City	Very high	142	1598	selective students and students from high SES background	Female – 34 years in the school, 8 years as the principal	12-year schooling Trilingual policy	Kazakh (29 classes), Russian (31 classes), English	95.5

**Oralmans* – those students who return from other countries (e.g. Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran) to their motherland. Some of those students may know only Arabic and do not speak Kazakh and/or Russian.

** Gymnasium and Lyceum. *** the highest Unified National Test score is 125.

Note: Approximate enrolment is shown to maintain confidentiality.

ⁱ MoES (Ministry of Education and Science) (2010), State Programme of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020. Kazakhstan is the 18th largest producer of oil in the world and an important source of natural gas.

ⁱⁱ Ministry of Education and Science (2012) Order No.57 ‘On approval of rules of principal replacement in comprehensive schools’. MoES, Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana.

ⁱⁱⁱ Olympiad is the rigorous competition in many different subjects, especially in sciences.

^{iv} The “*Typical qualification characteristics of positions of pedagogical personnel and other entities that equal to them*” approved by the order No. 338 of the MoES, Republic of Kazakhstan, from July 13, 2009

^v ‘*Isomorph*’ means social conditions or value postures that appear to share the same shape or meaning in different countries but actually consist of quite different elements (Begley, 2000, p.23)

^{vi} From the history of Kazakhstan it is known that with the Kazakh *aul*, a kind of self-management institute, was common. It co-existed alongside the traditional power and was formed as a result of the election by the community members of their ‘*aksakal*’ which solved the issues of the tribesmen’s lives. The elder was elected not on the basis of his economic status, nor his age or origin, but as a result of the wisdom and justice of the decisions he made (Nysanbayev, 2004, p.148).